Unifying the canonical, historical, and play-by-play present[1]

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Abstract. While the present tense is typically taken to index the reference time to the time of utterance, such a restriction cannot capture noncanonical uses of the present in English, such as the historical present or play-by-play present. We adopt a bicontextual semantics for present tense, in which the two time coordinates are mediated by pragmatics, allowing us to bring canonical, narrative, and play-by-play uses under a single denotation. Moreover, we show that such a treatment can also capture the novel observation that the historical use of the present tense can "anchor" the past perfect, while its other two uses cannot.

Keywords: tense, aspect, discourse structure, contextualism

The present tense in English has, in its canonical use, two properties that seem reasonably clear. First, it exhibits Utterance Indexicality: the present tense is used to describe eventualities that are simultaneous with the time of utterance. Second, it exhibits — unlike, say, German — what we might call Stativity: the present tense is only compatible with stative predicates, including derived ones (e.g., habituals).

(1) a. Susan **owns** the farm. *stative*

  b. # Mary **reads** the newspaper.
   Intended: 'Mary is reading the newspaper now.' *accomplishment*

  c. # James **plays** the violin.
   Intended: 'James is playing the violin now.' *activity*
   (Smith, 1997: 111)

There are, however, two uses of the present tense, often conflated (e.g., Smith 1997: 111), which run counter to this orthodoxy: the *play-by-play* present and the *historical* present.[2]

(2) *Play-by-play present*
   (USA vs. New Zealand, 2015 Women's Soccer Friendlies)
   Commentator: Wambach **leads** it back and now Krieger **has** it. Tobin Heath **goes** far.
    (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqe9n7zvnnw, 1:40:55)

(3) *Historical present*
   I couldn't believe it! Just as we arrived, up **comes** Ben and **slaps** me on the back as if we're life-long friends. "Come on, old pal," he **says**, "Let me buy you a drink!" I'm telling you, I nearly fainted on the spot. (Quirk et al., 1985: 181)

Neither of these noncanonical uses exhibits Stativity: both are quite congenial with nonstative predicates. The historical use, in addition, does not exhibit Utterance Indexicality.

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[1]We are grateful to audiences at Sinn und Bedeutung and the University of Arizona for their helpful comments and questions.

[2]In addition to these, there are headline, futurate, and performative uses of the present. These all violate Stativity, while the first two also violate Utterance Indexicality. We return to this issue in the conclusion.

We propose a unified semantics for the present tense in English that accounts for the properties of these two uses and the canonical present. There have been some previous attempts to derive one or the other of the noncanonical uses with customized solutions (Smith 1997: 185; Schlenker 2004; Eckardt 2015). We aim for a general theory that takes advantage of two pieces of off-the-shelf technology: i) a bicontextual semantics for tense (Sharvit, 2004, 2008), and ii) a version of Kamp and Reyle's (1993) semantics for the past perfect.

Our invocation of the past perfect comes from an apparently hitherto unnoticed contrast between the play-by-play and historical uses. The play-by-play present cannot "anchor" the past pefect—that is, it cannot describe an event which the past perfect locates another event anterior to, as shown in (4a). But the historical present can, as shown in (5a).

(4)   *Play-by-play present*
        Commentator: Federer serves. It's long. He looks at the line. He yells in protest.
        a.   # The judge **had called** a fault.
        b.   The judge **has called** a fault.
        c.   The judge **called** a fault.

(5)   *Historical present*
        Rumors of Berlusconi's crimes swirl. His advisors confront him. He scoffs.
        a.   He **had paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.
        b.   He **has paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.
        c.   He **paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.

In either of these uses, the present tense can, by contrast, be used to anchor the present perfect (4b, 5b) or simple past (4c, 5c).

Specifically, we propose that the present tense is indexical to the time of a *context of assessment* (Sharvit, 2004, 2008), which can be pragmatically distinct from the speech time, a coordinate of the *context of utterance* (cf. Schlenker 2004). When the present tense is unmoored from the speech time, Utterance Indexicality and Stativity are simultaneously lifted. In turn, we argue that the contrast in (4) and (5) reflects an additional restriction of the past perfect, namely that it is indexical to both the context of assessment and the context of utterance, cf. Kamp and Reyle (1993: 598). Together, these two ingredients correctly predict that, under the pragmatic norms governing the play-by-play present, the past perfect is inadmissable.

1. The canonical present

Both properties of the canonical present follow from standard treatments, where the present tense is sensitive to the time of the utterance context (*u*). A familar encoding of this is given in (6) within a referential theory of tense.
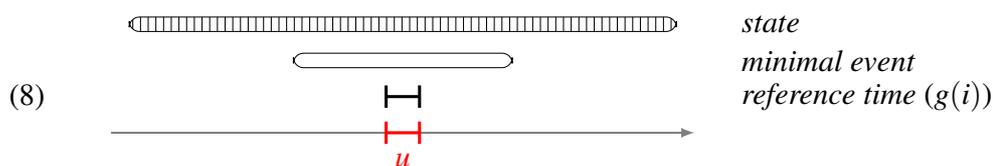
(6)   *A standard treatment of the present tense*
        $[\![\text{PRES}_i]\!]^{u,g}$ is defined iff $g(i) \subseteq \text{TIME}(u)$. When defined, $[\![\text{PRES}_i]\!]^{u,g} = g(i)$

Utterance Indexicality follows straightforwardly. Stativity also follows with three assumptions:

○ The utterance time, TIME(u), contains the reference time, $g(i)$, as opposed to being contained in it (Kratzer, 1998: 101) or simply overlapping it (von Stechow, 1995: 365).

○ Without progressive morphology, the present tense in English conveys perfective aspect (the eventuality is contained in the reference time) (Smith 1997: 110, Giorgi and Pianesi 1997: 163).

○ Utterances are conceived of as instantaneous (Kamp and Reyle 1993: 536–537, Giorgi and Pianesi 1997: 160, Smith 1997: 110–112, 2003: 103–104, a.o.), a constraint we formulate concretely as follows:

(7)   *Utterance Time Width (UTW)*
         $|\text{TIME}(u)| < \varepsilon$, where ε is the minimum size for an event

With Utterance Time Width, TIME(u) — and hence $g(i)$ contained inside it — is too narrow to contain the event described by an activity or accomplishment. Only statives, which have the subinterval property (Dowty, 1979), describe an eventuality that is small enough. There is always some subpart of a state, satisfying the eventuality description, which can fit inside TIME(u).

(8)   *state*
                                                             minimal event
                                                             reference time ($g(i)$)

                                    u

Even achievements and semelfactives are incompatible with the canonical present, unless they have an habitual interpretation.

(9)   a.   # Bill **wins** the race.
                Intended: 'Bill is winning/wins the race now.'   *achievement*
         b.   # Sue **coughs**.
                Intended: 'Sue is coughing/coughs (once) now.'   *semelfactive*
                                                                   (Smith, 1997: 111)

We take this to mean that the utterance time must, in fact, be so narrow that punctual events cannot be contained within it.

1.1. Extension to the play-by-play use

The play-by-play present, by our definition, is used in the direct reporting of circumstances as they unfold. It can be found in sportscasting (10a) and in demonstrations (10b) (Palmer 1965: 58, Leech 1971: 2–3).

(10)   a.   (USA vs. New Zealand, 2015 Women's Soccer Friendlies)
                 Commentator: Wambach **leads** it back and now Krieger **has** it. Tobin Heath
                 goes far.   (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqe9n7zvnnw, 1:40:55)
         b.   Demonstrator: Look, I **take** this card from the pack and **place** it under the
                 handkerchief so.   (Leech, 1971: 2)

Such play-by-play discourses do not require the perfective (a.k.a. simple present). There is a choice of aspect, depending on the nature of the events being described (Ferguson, 1983: 164). The perfective is used to describe a sequence of rapid, completed actions, as in a soccer game (10a), while the progressive is used to report longer, more continuous events, like those in a boat race (11).

(11)   (Men's 8 Rowing Final, 2008 Olympics)
         Commentator: Now the job for the Canadian crew is to hang on to the lead they had
         at the halfway mark. They **are breathing** hard. They really **are gulping** in the air
         there. But they know that they've got a good lead there. They know they can finish,
         but Great Britain **are moving** very well[...]
                                             (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkP3P5ucR4U, 5:37)

The play-by-play present always describes events that occur roughly at the time of utterance, so it exhibits Utterance Indexicality. Smith (1997: 111) offers one intuitive solution for why play-by-play sentences do not exhibit Stativity: they "telescope time. We understand them punctually, suspending our knowledge of their normal duration." In other words, durative predicates are coerced into describing an event small enough to fit inside the utterance time. Presumably, since the play-by-play present describes a completed interpretation in the perfective, this would include at least its end point.

(12)

There are several arguments that coercion cannot be what allows the play-by-play use to avoid Stativity. First, even punctual events are too large to be contained within the utterance time, as shown in (9) above, since achievements and semelfactives do not have a nonhabitual interpretation in the canonical present. The coercion operation that Smith implicates in the play-by-play present might, in principle, output an event small enough to fit within the utterance time. But this runs counter to conventional wisdom, which takes coercion to operate within a certain fixed inventory of eventuality predicates (Moens and Steedman, 1988; de Swart, 1998).

Second, if the play-by-play present involved coercion, then accomplishments should not exhibit the same ambiguity with *almost* that they do elsewhere (Dowty, 1979: 58).

(13)   John almost painted a picture.
         'John didn't start painting a picture.'
         'John started to paint a picture, but did not finish it.'   (Dowty, 1979: 58)

But in fact, accomplishment predicates do exhibit this ambiguity in the play-by-play present.

(14)   Commentator: Federer almost crosses the entire court.
         'Federer doesn't start to cross the court.'
         'Federer starts to cross the court, but does not get to finish.'

Finally, coercion cannot offer an explanation for why a play-by-play sentence cannot anchor the past perfect. In (4a) above, by the time the past perfect sentence describing the calling event is uttered, the yelling event is already in the past and should be able to anchor it.

(15)

That is, to account for the play-by-play use, it is not enough simply to manipulate the event structure of the predicate. Something must be said about how the eventuality described relates to other times in the context.

1.2. Extension to the historical use

What we call the historical present is used to describe situations that have already taken place or are simply imagined. It makes them more "dramatic" as if "someone actually witness[es] the events as they are described" (Palmer 1965: 39, Leech 1971: 6–7, Close 1981: 106). This historical use is frequently found in ordinary narratives (16a) and stage directions (16b).

(16)   a.   I couldn't believe it! Just as we arrived, up **comes** Ben and **slaps** me on the back as if we're life-long friends. "Come on, old pal," he **says**, "Let me buy you a drink!" I'm telling you, I nearly fainted on the spot.

                                                                              (Quirk et al., 1985: 181)

         b.   From the right, Willy Loman, the Salesman, **enters**, carrying two large sample cases. The flute **plays on**. He **hears**, but is not aware of it. He is past sixty years of age, dressed quietly. Even as he **crosses** the stage to the doorway of the house, his exhuastion is apparent. He **unlocks** the door, **comes** into the kitchen, and thankfully **lets** his burden down. . .

                                                                              (Miller, *Death of a Salesman*)

Assuming a typical utterance context, it is clear that a standard treatment of the present tense is incompatible with the historical use, since it does not exhibit Utterance Indexicality. However, the historical present could arise when the utterance context is *improper*, when one or more coordinates (e.g., speaker and addressee) does not coincide with the time coordinate (Predelli, 2005). For instance, in an answering machine message — *I am not here now, so please leave a message* — the time coordinate of the context might pick out the time of listening (decoding), even though the speaker does not utter (encode) the message at that time.

Eckardt (2015: 221–223) proposes that the historical present makes use of an improper context

(see also Bary 2016). At the risk of oversimplying, we might represent this as an operator that shifts just the time coordinate of the context.

(17) $[\![\, \text{HP}(\phi) \,]\!]^{\langle \text{TIME}(u), \text{SPEAKER}(u), \ldots \rangle, g} = [\![\, \phi \,]\!]^{\langle t_i, \text{SPEAKER}(u), \ldots \rangle, g}$

In these discourses, then, the time coordinate of the context identifies a past time t_i. A standard semantics for present tense will consequently locate the reference time at this time, rather than the actual time of utterance. This correctly predicts that the speaker coordinate can pick out an individual who does not even exist at the shifted time, as in (18).

(18)   Fifty eight years ago to this day, on January 22, 1944, just as the Americans **are** about to invade Europe, the Germans **attack** Vercors. **My grandfather** tries to escape. . .

                                                                                        (Schlenker, 2004: 298)

Under this account, however, it is mysterious why the historical present *can* anchor the past perfect, as in (5a) above. The past perfect describes a paying-off event that precedes the time of the scoffing event. With a standard semantics for the past perfect (e.g., Reichenbach 1947), this time must itself be located anterior to the time of the context. But the time of the context still *overlaps* the time of the scoffing event when the past perfect sentence is uttered.

(19)
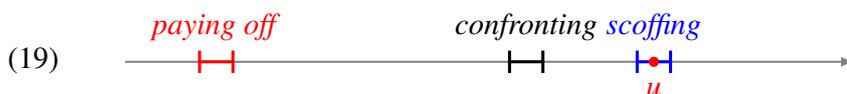
It is not enough simply to shift the time of the context to account for the historical present. Other tense-aspect categories, like the past perfect, are also sensitive to it.

1.3. The historical present in free indirect discourse

Before moving on, we should address a potential worry. One might think that the historical present is simply an instance of *free indirect discourse*, a literary style used to directly represent the perspective of a character (Banfield 1982; Doron 1991; a.o.). Indeed, many cases of the historical use feel as if they are filtered through the lens of a protagonist.

(20)   a.   **Creeping Christ?** he thinks. **What does he mean? His head turns sideways, his hair rests in his own vomit, the dog barks, Walter roars, and bells peal out across the water. He feels a sensation of movement, as if the filthy ground has become the Thames. It gives and sways beneath him; he lets out his breath, one great final gasp. You've done it this time, a voice tells Walter. But he closes his ears, or God closes them for him. He is pulled downstream, on a deep black tide.**   (Mantel, *Wolf Hall*)

         b.   She rejected one brush; she chose another. **When would those children come? When would they all be off?** she fidgeted. **That man**, she thought, her anger rising in her, **never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give.**   (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*)

It is not possible to reduce the historical present to free indirect discourse. The latter *necessarily* reports the perspective of a character (Banfield, 1982; Doron, 1991).

(21)   Context: Figaro sees Coutess Almaviva, who is wearing his wife's clothes.
         Figaro froze in place. He couldn't believe his eyes. **His wife** had swooned into the
         Count's arms and was now kissing him passionately.   (Doron, 1991: 54)

By contrast, there are uses of the historical present that do not force reporting of a character's perspective (i.e., definite descriptions that are not valid with respect to the protagonist).

(22)   Oedipus is very happy. He is going to see **his mother** again tomorrow.

While the historical present can occur in free indirect discourse, they cannot simply be equated. As it will turn out, we will adopt the semantics for the present tense that Sharvit (2004, 2008) proposes to account for free indirect discourse, and so we return briefly to this interaction later.

2. A proposal

We take natural language expressions to be interpreted relative to two contexts: a *context of utterance* (*u*) and a *context of assessment* (*a*). Such bicontextualism has been deployed in several empirical domains, including for free indirect discourse (Doron, 1991; Schlenker, 2004; Sharvit, 2004, 2008; Eckardt, 2015) and future tense (MacFarlane, 2003), as well as predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals (MacFarlane, 2014).

Individual expression can be sensitive to one, the other, or both of these contexts. Adopting the division that Sharvit (2004, 2008) proposes, local pronouns are sensitive to the utterance context, while tense is sensitive to the assessment context.

(23)   a. $[\![\,\text{I}\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = \text{SPEAKER}(u)$
         b. $[\![\,\text{you}\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = \text{ADDRESSEE}(u)$

(24)   a. $[\![\,\text{PRES}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g}$ is defined iff $g(i) \subseteq \text{TIME}(a)$. When defined, $[\![\,\text{PRES}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = g(i)$
         b. $[\![\,\text{PAST}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g}$ is defined iff $g(i) < \text{TIME}(a)$. When defined, $[\![\,\text{PAST}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = g(i)$

Sharvit takes temporal and locatival adverbials, such as *tonight* (25a) and *here* (25b), to be sensitive to the context of assessment.

(25)   a. $[\![\,\text{tonight}\,]\!]^{u,a,g}$ = the night of the day surrounding $\text{TIME}(a)$
         b. $[\![\,\text{here}\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = \text{LOCATION}(a)$

But we do not think that this is true of all temporal adverbials. In particular, those with *ago* seem sensitive to the context of utterance. The discourse below describes a series of past events. The continuation in (26a) is infelicitous because *two years ago* cannot receive a back-shifted interpretation: it picks out a time interval two years before the actual time of utterance.

(26)   I couldn't believe it! Just as we arrived, up comes Ben and slaps me on the back as
        if we're life-long friends.
    a.   # **Two years ago** he stole twenty dollars from me...
    b.   **Two years before** he stole twenty dollars from me...

While Sharvit assumes that the two contexts are always identical in root contexts, we propose that the assessment context can be *freely chosen*, subject to pragmatic considerations. In this, we are adapting an idea of Schlenker (2004), who also makes use of two contexts in his account of the historical present. For him, there is a context of thought, where "a thought originates," and a context of utterance, where "a thought is expressed." In spite of a superficial similiarity, these do not line up with the two contexts we appeal to, as Schlenker divides up context-sensitive expressions differently. Simplifying somewhat, local pronouns and tenses are sensitive to the context of utterance, while temporal and locatival adverbials are sensitive to the context of thought.

In the historical present, Schlenker proposes that the context of thought is set to the actual context, while the context of utterance is located elsewhere (in the past, in the thinker's imagination, etc.) This leads to several complications. First, temporal adverbials — such as, *tonight* in (27) — can shift in historical present discourses, and hence must be fixed by his context of utterance.

(27)   Forty years ago today John Lennon is about to take to the stage at the Cavern.
        Tonight his life will change forever.   (Schlenker, 2004: 296)

Second, the context of utterance must be improper, since the speaker need not exist at the time of the events described in the historical present, as shown in (18) above. Consequently, Schlenker's account cannot explain its ability to anchor the past perfect (§1.2).

Most importantly, Schlenker does not offer a unified account of canonical and noncanonical uses of the present, which is our goal. While we adopt a different version of bicontextualism — in particular, a different division of context-sensitive expressions — we will crucially allow the context of assessment to diverge pragmatically from the context of utterance.

3. Deriving the noncanonical uses

In the canonical present, the assessment time does not diverge from the utterance time. Stativity and Utterance Indexicality thus arise for the same reasons that we described earlier.

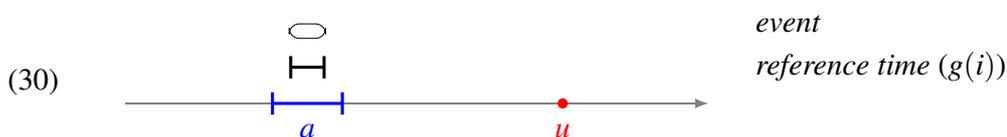(28)   *Canonical present*
        $\text{TIME}(a) = \text{TIME}(u)$

The noncanonical uses of the present tense arise when the assessment context stands in a different relation to the utterance context.

3.1. The historical present

Intuitively, the historical present can make something in the past "the present." For us, this involves pragmatically setting the time of assessment to some time before the utterance time. (For imagined events, the assessment time may not precede the utterance time, but it is similarly unmoored.)

(29)   *Historical present*
       $\text{TIME}(a) < \text{TIME}(u)$

Stativity for the canonical use arises from linking the assessment time to the utterance time, which must be very small. But if the assessment time is anterior, it can be wide enough for the reference time to contain a non-state.

(30)

event
reference time ($g(i)$)

The historical present thus does not exhibit Stativity.[3]

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[3] Free indirect discourse can occur quite freely inside a narrative in the historical present.

(i)   Louise places the parcel on the kitchen table. She can't wait to open it. **Who could have sent it? What does it contain? How shiny the wrapping paper is! The sender certainly must be rich. Today seems to be her lucky day.**   (Eckardt, 2015: 221)

This is easy to derive under Sharvit's (2004, 2008) account of free indirect discourse (*pace* Eckardt 2015: 221–224 and Bary 2016). For the simplified version of this discourse in (ii), a FID operator in the present tense quantifies over contexts that are compatible with what Louise believes at the time of the *assessment* context, yielding the truth conditions in (iii).

(ii)   Louise places the parcel on the kitchen table. **Today is her lucky day.**

(iii) When defined, $[\![\text{FID-Louise-PRES}_2\text{-w}_0 \text{ Today } \text{PRES}_3 \text{ be her lucky day}]\!]^{u,a,g} = 1$ iff for every context-assignment pair $\langle a', g' \rangle$ such that a' is compatible with what Louise believes at $g(2)$ (where $g(2) \subseteq \text{TIME}(a)$) in $\text{WORLD}(a)$, the day surrounding $\text{TIME}(a')$ is her lucky day at $g'(3)$ (where $g'(3) \subseteq \text{TIME}(a')$) in $\text{WORLD}(a')$

Is it possible to shift into the historical present inside an FID context? This is not easy to show, but perhaps not.

(iv)   Mary ran, stumbling, down the steps of the station. She was going to miss her train, she thought. How had she gotten here? She had been responsible and thought of everything.
  a.   # That morning, she **wakes** up bright and early, heading straight out the door. She **rushes** to the DMV and **gets** in line right when they open.
  b.   That morning, she **woke** up bright and early, heading straight out the door. She **rushed** to the DMV and **got** in line right when they opened.

Under Sharvit's account, a (non-double-access) present tense should *in principle* be possible when the FID operator is past, yielding a simultaneous reading like that available for a bound past tense. She argues that in such cases a preference for the bound past (based on a preference for *de se* pronouns) trumps the present tense (Sharvit, 2008: 388). The same should apply to the historical present as well.

It remains an open question how the assessment time is chosen in the historical present, if TIME(a) must simply precede TIME(u). We do not yet completely understand when or how this happens. On the one hand, speakers seem able to move the context of assessment at will, as shown by their ability to alternate freely between the past and the historical use of the present.

(31)   Then all of a sudden everybody **gets** involved and they **made** a mess. So uh... this lady **says**... uh this uh Bert, "Oh, my son'll make them. He's an electrician." So he **makes** them, and he **charges** all the neighbors twenty dollars a set, and there I **paid** three dollars. So I **called** her a crook. And I **called** her son a crook. So, they **were** really mad at me.   (Schiffrin, 1981: 46)

But on the other hand, there do seem to be constraints on what the context of assessment can be: it is hard to push it backwards.

(32)   He looks at the ceiling.
   a.   # Yesterday, a spider **is** climbing there.
   b.   Yesterday, a spider **was** climbing there.

Perhaps, these two cases might be unified by a principle that only allows the assessment context to move forward in time. We leave this issue for the future.

3.2. The play-by-play present

Intuitively, the play-by-play use describes an event that ends "at" the utterance time. There is some evidence that speakers wait until an event has terminated to report it (Mathon and Boulaki, 2011). This can arise if the assessment time is pragmatically set so that it properly contains the utterance time.

(33)   *Play-by-play present*
        TIME(a) $\supsetneq$ TIME(u)

The play-by-play use does not exhibit Stativity, then, because TIME(a) can again be wide enough for the reference time to contain a non-state.

(34)

$$\text{event}$$
$$\text{reference time } (g(i))$$
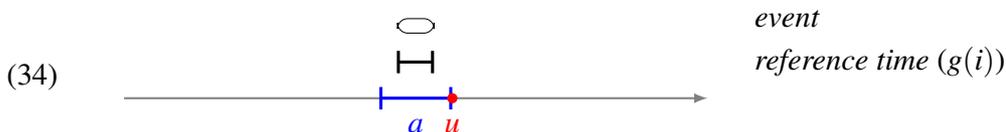
A caveat: The relation in (33) allows, in principle, for the assessment time to continue after the utterance time. This would permit an event to be *ongoing* during the utterance time. But this is not how people use the play-by-play present. As we showed in (10–11) above, there is a contrast between the simple present (for culminated events) and the present progressive (for ongoing ones). This suggests that there is an additional constraint at work: the Upper Limit Constraint (Abusch, 1997), which bans reference to times after the local "now." In our formulation, this amounts to a condition on the times of the two contexts:

(35)   *Bicontextual Upper Limit Constraint (ULC)*
         $max(\{t : t \in \text{TIME}(a)\}) = max(\{t : t \in \text{TIME}(u)\})$

If no part of the assessment time can follow the utterance time, then events will always have terminated by the utterance time in the play-by-play use of the present.

3.3. What other relations are possible?

One salient question is what other temporal relations between the utterance and assessment contexts are possible. There are eight relations one might imagine: $<, >, =, \subseteq, \subsetneq, \supseteq, \supsetneq, \circ$. However, as the following shows, our constraints on the width of the utterance interval and upper limits on $\text{TIME}(a)$ collapse several of these together.

(36)   a. $\text{TIME}(a) < \text{TIME}(u)$: *historical present*
       b. $\text{TIME}(a) > \text{TIME}(u)$: forbidden by the Bicontextual ULC (35)
       c. $\text{TIME}(a) = \text{TIME}(u)$: *canonical present*
            $\text{TIME}(a) \subsetneq \text{TIME}(u)$: difficult to distinguish from $\text{TIME}(a) = \text{TIME}(u)$, given UTW (7)
            $\text{TIME}(a) \subseteq \text{TIME}(u)$: difficult to distinguish from $\text{TIME}(a) = \text{TIME}(u)$, given UTW (7)
       d. $\text{TIME}(a) \supsetneq \text{TIME}(u)$: *play-by-play*
            $\text{TIME}(a) \supseteq \text{TIME}(u)$: difficult to distinguish from $\text{TIME}(a) \supsetneq \text{TIME}(u)$
            $\text{TIME}(a) \circ \text{TIME}(u)$: identical to $\text{TIME}(a) \supsetneq \text{TIME}(u)$, given the bicontextual ULC (35)

In the end, all possible relations between the utterance and assessment times reduce to just the three that are attested.

4. Accounting for the past perfect contrast

The ingredients are now in place to return to our initial empirical question: Why is the past perfect fine with the historical present, but not the play-by-play present?

(37)   *Historical present*
        Rumors of Berlusconi's crimes swirl. His advisors confront him. He scoffs.
        a.   He **had paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.
        b.   He **has paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.
        c.   He **paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.

(38)   *Play-by-play present*
        Commentator: Federer serves. It's long. He looks at the line. He yells in protest.
        a.   # The judge **had called** a fault.
        b.   The judge **has called** a fault.
        c.   The judge **called** a fault.

It should be noted that the play-by-play use is not alone. The past perfect is also incompatible with the canonical use of the present.

(39)   *Canonical present*
         Trump isn't listening to his new campaign manager.
         a.   # She **had let** him down.
         b.   She **has let** him down.
   c.   She **let** him down.

We suggest that this commonality is not accidental: both the canonical and play-by-play uses involve an assessment time that overlaps the utterance time. In the following we exploit this. We show how a perspectival treatment of the past perfect, like that of Kamp and Reyle (1993), can lead to temporal inconsistences in these uses, though not in the historical present, where the assessment time is unmoored from the utterance time.

4.1. Perspective in the past perfect

Kamp and Reyle (1993) propose that the past perfect can encode a Reichenbachian pluperfect, locating the reference time anterior to a salient past "perspective point."[4]

(40)   Fred arrived at 10. He **had got up** at 5; he **had taken** a long shower, **had got** dressed and **had eaten** a leisurely breakfast. He **had left** the house at 6:30.

                                                                           (Kamp and Reyle, 1993: 594)

In narrative flashbacks, a sequence of past perfect sentences is interpreted as forward moving. Each sentence's reference time advances, though they are all anterior to the same perspective point.

(41)
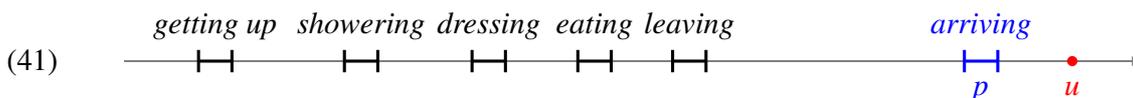
For Kamp and Reyle, past perfect morphology is compatible with a combination of two semantic features, which require the reference time to precede a perspective point that precedes the utterance time.

(42)   a.   +PAST: $p < \text{TIME}(u)$
         b.   *past*: $g(i) < p$ (Kamp and Reyle, 1993: 601)

4.2. Incorporating the perspective point

We translate Kamp and Reyle's framework into our own by equating p and $\text{TIME}(a)$:

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[4]For Reichenbach (1947), the perspective point is the *reference time*. He does not aim to account for narrative flashbacks.

(43)   *Past perfect in a bicontextual framework*
        a. $\text{TIME}(a) < \text{TIME}(u)$
        b. $g(i) < \text{TIME}(a)$

It is clear, then, why the past perfect is not compatible with the canonical and play-by-play presents. Its requirement that the assessment time precede the utterance time contradicts their pragmatic setting of the assessment time to (at least) contain the utterance time.

(44)   *Canonical present*
        $\text{TIME}(a) = \text{TIME}(u)$

(45)   *Play-by-play present*
        $\text{TIME}(a) \supsetneq \text{TIME}(u)$

Thus, only the historical present, which locates $\text{TIME}(a)$ before $\text{TIME}(u)$, allows the past perfect.

4.3. Equivalence with the simple past and present perfect

After a sentence in the historical present, the simple past and present perfect are able, intuitively, to describe the same event as the past perfect, as in (46), repeated from above.

(46)   Rumors of Berlusconi's crimes swirl. His advisors confront him. He scoffs.
        a.   He **had paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.
        b.   He **has paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.
        c.   He **paid** off the prostitute for her silence already.

The paying off event is anterior to the assessment time, satisfying the requirements of the past perfect. Those of the past tense are also met, which similarly requires that the reference time precede the assessment time.

(47) $[\![\,\text{PAST}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g}$ is defined iff $g(i) < \text{TIME}(a)$. When defined, $[\![\,\text{PAST}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = g(i)$

The present perfect, too, locates the paying off event before the assessment time. We assume that it encodes the combination of present tense and a (roughly Parsonian) perfect aspect, which describes the poststate of some eventuality.

(48)   a. $[\![\,\text{PRES}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g}$ is defined iff $g(i) \subseteq \text{TIME}(a)$. When defined, $[\![\,\text{PRES}_i\,]\!]^{u,a,g} = g(i)$
        b. $[\![\,\text{PERF VP}\,]\!]^{u,a,g}(t) = 1$ iff $\exists e_1 \exists e_2 ([\![\,\text{VP}\,]\!]^{u,a,g}(e_1) = 1 \wedge \text{POST-STATE}(e_2, e_1) \wedge t \subseteq \tau(e_2))$

The conditions in (48a–b) together ensure that there is a poststate of Berlusconi's paying off that overlaps the assessment time (e.g., the time of the scoffing in (46)).

The temporal differences between the past perfect, present perfect, and simple past are leveled, then, when the assessment time and utterance time are decoupled, as in discourses with the historical present.

5. Conclusion and future directions

We have combined three existing ideas in the literature: i) a bicontextual semantics for tense, proposed originally for free indirect discourse (Sharvit, 2004, 2008); ii) a bicontextual treatment of the past perfect, cf. Kamp and Reyle (1993); and, iii) pragmatic setting of the assessment context, cf. Schlenker (2004). Combining these approaches allows us to directly predict: the felicity of the present tense in its canonical, play-by-play, and historical uses; why the play-by-play and historical present do not exhibit Stativity, but the canonical present does; and, why the historical use is compatible with past perfect, but the other two uses are not.

Importantly, we do not have to appeal to any special mechanisms beyond the idea that pragmatics controls when the time of assessment diverges from the time of utterance. More generally, we have proposed that three diverse cases of temporal perspectival shift — free indirect discourse, past perfect anchoring, and the historical present — can be given a unified account as a shift in the same indexical coordinate, TIME(a).

In closing, we would like to consider the prospects of extending this theory to other noncanonical uses of the present tense. In most cases, we believe, scrutiny will fall on our ancillary assumptions, not the bicontextual semantics itself. For performative uses, the question ultimately is how Stativity is obviated — is the assessment time unmoored, as in the play-by-play and historical present, or do such uses speak against the restriction on utterance width? For the futurate and future-like uses in (49a–b), the issues concern the ULC, which we appealed to for preventing the assessment time from following the utterance time.

(49) a. The Yankees **play** the Red Sox tomorrow.   (Lakoff, 1971: 339)

b. Es bezieht   sich. Wir **kriegen**   Regen.
     it cover.PRES.3SG self. we **get.PRES.1PL** rain
     'It's getting cloudy. We'll get some rain.'   (Hilpert, 2008: 170)

While the English case is a futurate (with a scheduled interpretation), the German just expresses probability. It thus may be that the present tense can impose different restrictions on TIME(a) and TIME(u) across languages.

In addition, a broader theory of the present tense should account for how its various uses are deployed in the construction of larger discourses. One concrete case is narrative progression, which the historical present licenses in the same way that the simple past does.

(50) a. John **gets up**, **goes** to the window, and **raises** the blind. It is light out. He **pulls** the blind down and **goes** back to bed.

b. John **got up**, **went** to the window, and **raised** the blind. It was light out. He **pulled** the blind down and **went** back to bed.   (Partee, 1984: 253)

Early accounts of narrative progression linked it to specific properties of temporal and aspectual morphemes (Kamp and Rohrer, 1983; Partee, 1984; Hinrichs, 1986; Kamp and Reyle, 1993). The fact that the historical present also exhibits narrative progression suggests that it may, in fact, be more about the pragmatics of descriptions of event sequences (Kehler, 2002; Smith, 2003; Asher and Lascarides, 2003; Klein, 2009; Altshuler, 2010). What these pragmatic principles are, and how they should be integrated with tense, is a subject for future research.

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